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ABSTRACT

In a sixth-grade unit, students learned about people's facial expressions through careful observation, recording, reporting, and generalizing. The students studied the faces of people of various ages; explored "masks" that people wear in different situations; learned about the use of ritual masks; made case studies of individuals to show facial changes that occur with mood changes; studied different facial expressions that people use as one way of manipulating others; related facial expressions to the ego states described in transactional analysis; and studied the relationships between facial type and ancestral background. Throughout the unit the children were encouraged to verbalize about their findings. In addition to expressing their findings in journals, letters, essays, descriptions, plays, poems, and a class booklet, the children employed fabric collages, a slide presentation, charts, pantomime, and plaster-of-paris masks in reporting their conclusions to others. The teacher, as facilitator, poser of questions, and resource person, performed as a catalyst to enhance such interacting forces as the environment, books, and other people. (GW)

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THE MANY FACES OF LANGUAGE

Anne M. Werdmann

"You look like you're mad at the world."

"I'm not mad--I'm just trying to figure out this problem."

Two students start to discuss why the second one thought the first was angry. They are joined by two more sixth graders and the group begins to talk about how facial expressions influence the way people act toward each other.

They decide they don't know enough about the topic and so set out to collect data. Each student starts observing facial expressions of people in various situations and takes notes on those observations.

PERSON OBSERVED	FEELINGS COMMUNICATED	FACIAL APPEARANCE
Student--after winning a contest	jubilant, excited	wide smile eyes sparkling face flushed
Principal--with misbehaving child	stern, serious	lips drawn/straight eyes somewhat squinted eyebrows pulled
New student--arriving at school	scared, nervous	eyes wide half-smiling lips face slightly flushed

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Student whose dog was killed yesterday	sad, listless	pale lips and eyes drooping
Teacher--early in the day	happy, eager	flashing eyes rosy cheeks smiling mouth
Teacher--at the end of the day	tired, half-sad	drooping eyes sagging lips pale
Embarrassed child	uncomfortable	face very red eyes watery lips drawn

Later in the day, the students gather and compare notes. They discover similarities in their drawings. The teacher and other students, having noticed the sketching going on during the day, begin to ask questions about the project. The students show the others what they are doing--this gives rise to new questions: "Does a person's age influence his facial expressions?" "Why do people get 'red in the face'?" "Is the color of the eyes a factor in the impressions given and received?"

Soon, more students, along with the teacher, join the project in order to find some of the answers to the questions raised.

One student lives with his grandparents. He makes a study of their faces at different times of the day and in various situations. He finds that their expressions vary with changes in mood just like those of younger people. He sees some differences, however, in the general appearance of their faces. When they are relaxed, their eyes, lips and skin droop quite a bit. Their skin is wrinkled in comparison to his own smooth textured facial covering.

Later, he observes his tiny baby sister. He sees that her lips turn up and her eyes sparkle when she is gurgling and playing happily. When she is uncomfortable, her little face is all screwed up with squinting eyes, wrinkled nose and turned down mouth. He also compares the baby's general facial characteristics with his own. He finds her skin to be more delicate, smoother and rosier than his own even though everyone says she looks just like him!

This boy discusses his findings with his teacher and other students. Together they think of a way to show others what has been discovered about the faces of people of various ages. One difference that impressed the boy doing the research is that of texture. The children begin to look for materials to use to show that difference to others. They find pieces of satin, silk and coarser materials and make collages of faces at different stages of life: baby, young child, adolescent, adult, middle-aged, elderly. With the textured material and flow-pen lines they are able to depict the typical changes that age makes in facial appearance.

Another child who lives in a high-rise apartment becomes more conscious of facial expressions of people who ride up and down on the elevator with him. He notices that they seldom speak and their faces are very plain and set. It seems impossible to detect any emotion at all. It looks like everyone put on a mask before boarding the elevator. This makes him curious and he begins to observe people in other public places. His mother shows him the chapter in Body Language entitled "The Masks Men Wear " (Fast, 1971). He finds that people generally hide their emotions or assume a variety of facial maskings at various times. Through discussion with his teacher and fellow students, he identifies some of those times. Exploring with plaster of paris, he produces the following masks:

party face

elevator face

funeral face

school face

Other students' interest in masks lead them to the library to find out about the history of their use. Old issues of National Geographic as well as many illustrated trade books are examined. The children find that masks have been and still are an important part of rituals in many cultures. Beautiful pictures of masks from all around the world excite the children. They look for a way to show the others what they have found that would still preserve the quality of the pictures without every person having to look through every book. With some help from the teacher, these children organize a slide presentation that can be shown to their friends as well as to their parents.

All the children help find appropriate articles and pictures. One group works on preparing slides of the illustrations chosen, while another group composes a narrative to accompany the slide presentation. Since most of the pictures show masks used during ritualistic dances, a third group finds music to provide appropriate background for the narration.

Several children are fascinated with the facial changes that occur as a person's mood is altered. They each decide to do a case study of an individual subject and record their observations over a period of time. They use cameras and sketching equipment in order to capture the facial expressions made. From that input they pool their collective data and begin charting their findings, making generalizations about what features change with which emotions.

The chart is one method of sharing their observations with the rest of the class, but they decide that it would be fun to see if they could show different feelings by pantomime. They practice in front of mirrors until they are ready to demonstrate changing facial expressions for the others. Additional help is available from the teacher and from library books (for example: Carlson, 1956; Holl, 1973). By having the class guess the feelings being portrayed, the students are able to test out their own ability to communicate with facial expressions alone.

The teacher shares with the class the book The Family of Man (Steichen, 1955) which shows the photographic exhibition by the same title prepared for the Museum of Modern Art. It contains 503 pictures from sixty-eight countries of people of all ages, in many various situations

showing a wide range of emotions. Parts of the Prologue by Carl Sandburg are read to the children, especially the section on human faces.

This leads to the observation of faces in other magazines and books. One group collects pictures of faces of models in advertisements, another of famous people in the news and a third of literary characters. These pictures are organized by the students into a class booklet: "Faces of Fact and Fiction." The children write captions for the pictures, grouping them according to emotions shown. One student prepares a Prologue for the entire collection which invites readers to look and reflect on what feelings are portrayed in the pictures.

Some children notice that people use different facial expressions as one way of manipulating others--to get things their own way. They invite a parent/psychologist in to speak to the class on this topic. The books Games Students Play (Ernst, 1967) and TA for Kids (Freed, 1971) provide background for furthering their understanding of the methods students use to get other people to treat them a certain way. The children who are interested in this aspect of behavior prepare a report for the rest of the class in which they explain the three ego states from which every person operates. They also write descriptions of students' faces when they are acting as:

natural child

adapted child

free child

adult

nurturing parent

critical parent

One group concentrates on the faces of the class itself. They study them and categorize them according to:

shape--round, oval, square

color of eyes--blue, green, brown, hazel

noses--pugged, flat, Roman, wide

eyebrows--bushy, sparse, curved

foreheads--high, narrow, protruding

cheeks--high-boned, rounded, sallow

chins--square, receding, angular

They then ask each student about his ancestry and tabulate and compare that information with the above data. They are testing out the hypothesis that certain characteristics can be correlated with different nationalities. The results are compiled and presented in the form of a written report with composite pictures of people in each group.

Some students look for descriptions of faces in literature. They investigate and compare phrases used such as "long face," "twinkling blue eyes," "penetrating dark eyes," and "crinkled nose." Each individual writes a description of a face trying out new figures of speech, especially original metaphors and similes.

On every field trip, especially on a visit to the airport, the students speculate about the feelings of the people they observe. They

find that travelers often drop the masks they wear on other public occasions. The children make guesses about whether an individual is there as a traveler himself or to meet someone else; they study faces for signs of exasperation, anticipation or jubilation; they easily recognize cues that signal impatience, fatigue, anxiety or nervousness.

Interest in faces may lead to additional investigations where the students observe what is happening, report on what happened, generalize about what happens, and theorize about what may happen (Moffett, 1968). Related topics might include:

- faces depicted by cartoonists
- death masks
- make-up used socially
- make-up used in the theater
- heredity and its relation to facial characteristics
- physical changes/flushed faces
- hand puppets
- origin and popularity of the happy face.

The students as described in this paper are proceeding from the implicit to the explicit. All their lives they have been reacting to the moods of others as they communicated to them through facial expressions. Now through careful observation, recording, reporting and generalizing, they are aware of how people change facial expressions consciously and unconsciously. They see that certain changes may have more than one meaning, but that it is possible to predict changes related to certain emotions. They summarize their findings through various media and use the information gleaned to formulate their own

theories. They are encouraged to verbalize all along the way; their expressions take many forms, not the least of which is creative writing: journals, letters, essays, descriptions, plays, poems, and the like.

From whatever vantage point they start, the participants undoubtedly use much interpersonal language as they explore their topic. They investigate reality by observing, questioning, and comparing. In their cooperative efforts at reporting, their language takes on aspects of regulation and information, as well as persuasion. They observe rituals and conventions of language throughout the process. Imaginative language is employed in speculating about ideas and fancies outside the realm of their experiences. Much of their reporting is expressive in nature; hopefully, some individual expressions can be classified as poetic when the form and content merge to become an integrated whole.

The experiences described in this paper can be analyzed according to Britton's model for fostering language (Britton, 1970). The first steps the children take are those of recording. Observing faces of people in different situations and of various ages, sketching pictures of how they look at different times, studying snapshots and making charts of similarities and differences, collecting pictures of faces in books and magazines and reading descriptions in literature are all activities of this function.

The students find many ways to report their conclusions to others. Textured collages of faces, the slide presentation, captions and pictures arranged in the class book, plaster of paris masks, charts, written reports, and pantomiming are examples of reporting methods employed.

Narratives are used to accompany the filmstrip presentation as well as in writing up the case studies. Journals kept of extended observations and reports about the way people use facial expressions to get their own way could also be included in this category.

Generalizations are being made at all stages of the experience. What faces are like at different ages of life, how people use their eyes and mouths to show different emotions, what flushing and blushing mean, how people manipulate others with their looks, and facial characteristics that distinguish different nationalities all call for drawing conclusions from the information gathered.

The children speculate about many things as they progress in the study. Reasons why people mask their emotions, ways people use facial expressions to get what they want, what emotions people are showing by changes in facial expressions, how teachers and fellow-students feel when they look a certain way, how they will look as adults, what an emotionless world would be like, whether or not uniform skin color would erase racial prejudice, and whether or not their image of themselves corresponds with the image others have of them are examples of theorizing on the part of the students.

The conative function is employed mainly as the students cooperate on exploring and reporting their findings.

While much of what has been described could possibly fit into the realm of the poetic, likely candidates are the Prologue written for the class book, the writings containing original similes and metaphors, as well as the descriptions of people operating from different ego states.

The teacher as facilitator, poser of questions, and resource is hardly visible, yet she is present and active as a catalyst along with other interacting forces, namely, the environment, books, and other people. The children, consequently, as free agents in their own learning, mature and flourish as listeners, speakers, readers, and writers.

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